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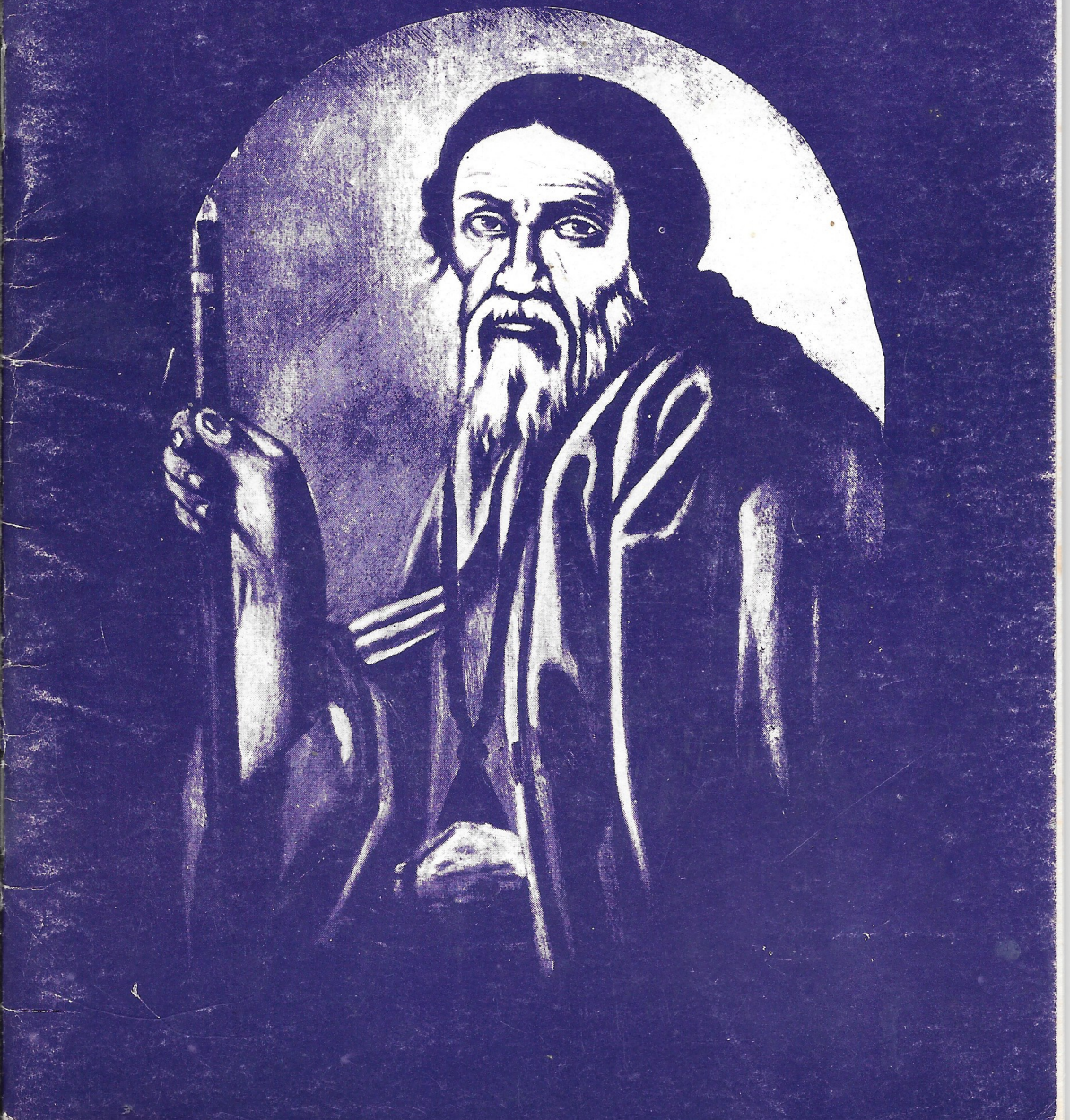

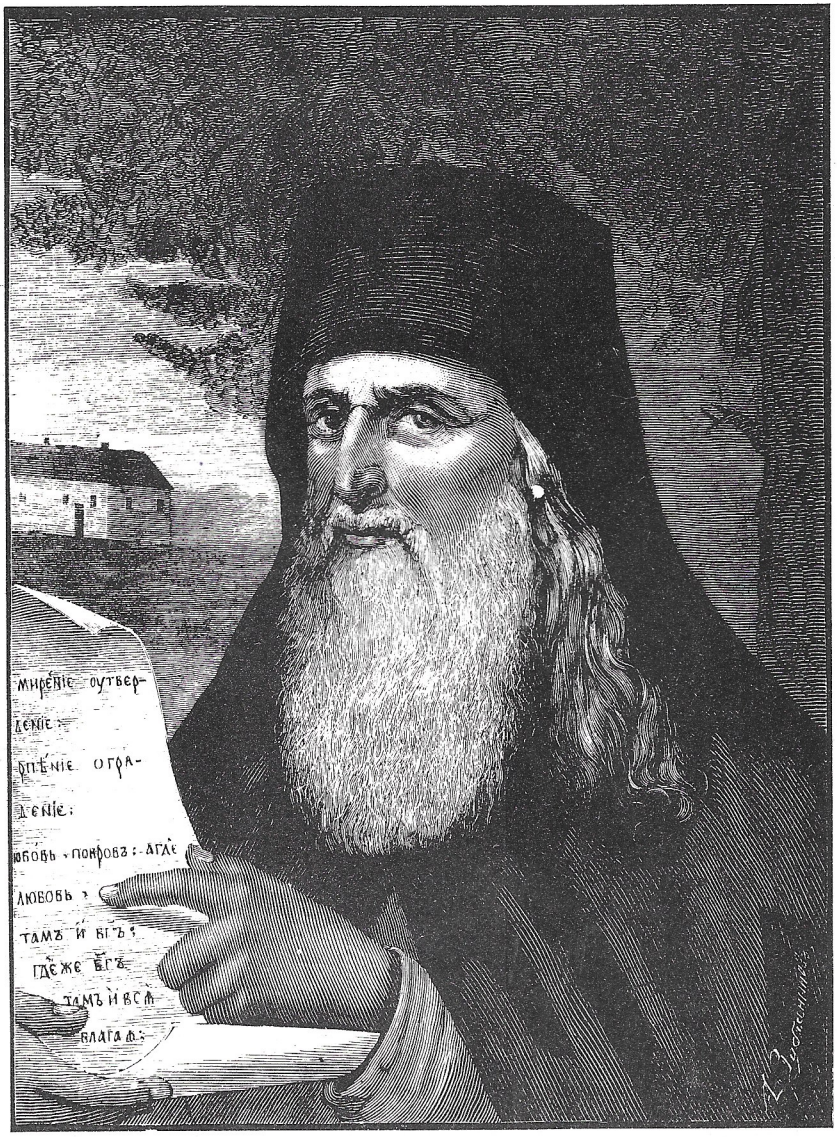

ELDER NAZARIUS OF VALAAM

This famous portrait depicts the elder before his cell near Valaam's cemetery.

From this day, from this hour,
from this minute, let us strive
to love God above all,
and fulfill His holy will.

THE ORTHODOX WORD

For the Mission of True Orthodox Christianity

Established with the blessing of His Eminence the late *John (Maximovitch)*, Archbishop of Western America and San Francisco, Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

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Subhumanity

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ABSURD
by Father Seraphim Rose

This study was written by the late editor of The Orthodox Word *as a subchapter in his book* The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Man, *on which he was working at the time of his conversion to Orthodoxy in the early 1960's and which, unfortunately, was never finished. Although written 20 years ago, this indepth study rings true, for today we see only too clearly the disastrous effects of this philosophy of the absurd.*

The present age is, in a profound sense, an age of absurdity. Poets and dramatists, painters and sculptors proclaim and depict the world as a disjointed chaos, and man as a dehumanized fragment of that chaos. Politics, whether of the right, the left, or the center, can no longer be viewed as anything but an expedient whereby universal disorder is given, for the moment, a faint semblance of order; pacifists and militant crusaders are united in an absurd faith in the feeble powers of man to remedy an intolerable situation by means which can only make it worse. Philosophers and other supposedly responsible men in governmental, academic, and ecclesiastical circles, when they do not retreat behind the impersonal and irresponsible facade of specialization or bureaucracy, usually do no more than rationalize the incoherent state of contemporary man and his world, and counsel a futile "commitment" to a discredited humanist

optimism, to a hopeless stoicism, to blind experimentation and irrationalism, or to "commitment" itself, a suicidal faith in "faith".

But art, politics, and philosophy today are only reflections of life, and if they have become absurd it is because, in large measure, life has become so. The most striking example of absurdity in life in recent times was, of course, Hitler's "new order", wherein a supposedly normal, civilized man could be at one and the same time an accomplished and moving interpreter of Bach (as was Himmler) and a skilled murderer of millions, or who might arrange a tour of an extermination camp to coincide with a concert series or an exhibition of art. Hitler himself, indeed, was the absurd man *par excellence*, passing from nothingness to world rule and back to nothingness in the space of a dozen years, leaving as his monument nothing but a shattered world, owing his meaningless success to the fact that he, the emptiest of men, personified the emptiness of the men of his time.

Hitler's surrealist world is now a thing of the past; but the world has by no means passed out of the age of absurdity, but rather into a more advanced—though temporarily quieter—stage of the same disease. Men have invented a weapon to express, better than Hitler's gospel of destruction, their own incoherence and nihilism; and in its shadow men stand paralyzed, between the extremes of an external power and an internal powerlessness equally without precedent. At the same time, the poor and "underprivileged" of the world have awakened to conscious life, and seek abundance and privilege; those who already possess them waste their lives in the pursuit of vain things, or become disillusioned and die of boredom and despair, or commit senseless crimes. The whole world, it almost seems, is divided into those who lead meaningless, futile lives without being aware of it, and those who, being aware of it, are driven to madness and suicide.

It is unnecessary to multiply examples of a phenomenon of which everyone is aware. Suffice it to say that these examples are typical, and even the most extreme of them are but advanced forms of the disorder which surrounds every one of us today and which, if we know not how to combat it, takes up residence in our hearts. Ours is an age of absurdity, in which the totally irreconcilable exists side by side, even in the same soul; where nothing seems to any purpose; where things fall apart because they have no center to hold them together. It is true, of course, that the

business of daily life seems to proceed as usual—though at a suspiciously feverish pace—, men manage to "get along", to live from day to day. But that is because they do not, or will not think; and one can hardly blame them for that, for the realities of the present day are not pleasant ones. Still, it is only the person who does think, who does ask what, beneath the distractions of daily life, is really happening in the world—it is only such a person who can feel even remotely "at home" in the strange world we live in today, or can feel that this age is, after all, "normal".

It is *not* a "normal" age in which we live; whatever their exaggerations and errors, however false their explanations, however contrived their world-view, the "advanced" poets, artists, and thinkers of the age are at least right in one respect: there is something frightfully wrong with the contemporary world. This is the first lesson we may learn from absurdism.

For absurdism is a profound symptom of the spiritual state of contemporary man, and if we know how to read it correctly we may learn much of that state. But this brings us to the most important of the initial difficulties to be disposed of before we can speak of the absurd. Can it be understood at all? The absurd is, by its very nature, a subject that lends itself to careless or sophistical treatment; and such treatment has indeed been given it, not only by the artists who are carried away by it, but by the supposedly serious thinkers and critics who attempt to explain or justify it. In most of the works on contemporary "existentialism", and in the apologies for modern art and drama, it would seem that intelligence has been totally abandoned, and critical standards are replaced by a vague "sympathy" or "involvement", and by extralogical if not illogical arguments that cite the "spirit of the age" or some vague "creative" impulse or an indeterminate "awareness"; but these are not arguments, they are at best rationalizations, at worst mere jargon. If we follow that path we may end with a greater "appreciation" of absurdist art, but hardly with any profounder understanding of it. Absurdism, indeed, may not be understood at all in its own terms; for understanding is coherence, and that is the very opposite of absurdity. If we are to understand the absurd at all, it must be from a standpoint outside absurdity, a standpoint from which a word like "understanding" has a meaning; only thus may we cut through the intellectual fog within which absurdism conceals itself, discouraging coherent and rational attack by its own assault on reason and coherence.

We must, in short, take a stand within a faith opposed to the absurdist faith and attack it in the name of a truth of which it denies the existence. In the end we shall find that absurdism, quite against its will, offers its own testimony to this faith and this truth which are—let us state at the outset—Christian.

The philosophy of the absurd is, indeed, nothing original in itself; it is entirely negation, and its character is determined, absolutely and entirely, by that which it attempts to negate. The absurd could not even be conceived except in relation to something considered *not* to be absurd; the fact that the world fails to make sense could occur only to men who have once believed, and have good reason to believe, that it does make sense. Absurdism cannot be understood apart from its Christian origins.

Christianity is, supremely, coherence, for the Christian God has ordered everything in the universe, both with regard to everything else and wtih regard to Himself, Who is the beginning and end of all creation; and the Christian whose faith is genuine finds this divine coherence in every aspect of his life and thought. For the absurdist, everything falls apart, including his own philosophy, which can only be a short-lived phenomenon; for the Christian, everything holds together and is coherent, including those things which in themselves are incoherent. The incoherence of the absurd is, in the end, part of a larger coherence; if it were not, there would be little point in speaking of it at all.

The second of the initial difficulties in approaching the absurd concerns the precise manner of approach. It will not do—if we wish to understand it—to dismiss absurdism as mere error and self-contradiction; it is these, to be sure, but it is also much more. No competent thinker, surely, can be tempted to take seriously any absurdist claim to truth; no matter from which side one approaches it, absurdist philosophy is nothing but self-contradiction. To proclaim ultimate meaninglessness, one must believe that this phrase has a meaning, and thus one denies it in affirming it; to assert that "there is no truth", one must believe in the truth of this statement, and so again affirm what one denies. Absurdist philosophy, it is clear, is not to be taken seriously as philosophy; all its objective statements must be reinterpreted imaginatively, and often subjectively. Absurdism, in fact—as we shall see—is not a product of the intellect at all, but of the will.

The philosophy of the absurd, while implicit in a large number of contemporary works of art, is fortunately quite explicit—if we know how

to interpret it—in the writings of Nietzsche; for his nihilism is precisely the root from which the tree of absurdity has grown. In Nietzsche we may read the philosophy of the absurd; in his older contemporary Dostoevsky we may see described the sinister implications which Nietzsche, blind to the Christian truth which is the only remedy for the absurd view of life, failed to see. In these two writers, living at the dividing point between two worlds, when the world of coherence based on Christian truth was being shattered and the world of the absurd based on its denial was coming into being, we may find almost everything there is of importance to know about the absurd.

The absurdist revelation, after a long period of underground germination, bursts into the open in the two striking phrases of Nietzsche so often quoted: "God is dead" means, simply, that faith in God is dead in the hearts of modern men; and "there is no truth" means that men have abandoned the truth revealed by God upon which all European thought and institutions once were based, they have abandoned it because they no longer find it credible. Both statements are indeed true of what has, since Nietzsche's time, become the vast majority of those who were once Christian. It is true of the atheists and satanists who profess to be content or ecstatic at their own lack of faith and rejection of truth; it is equally true of the less pretentious multitudes in whom the sense of spiritual reality has simply evaporated, whether this event be expressed in indifference to spiritual reality, in that spiritual confusion and unrest so widespread today, or in any of the many forms of pseudo-religion that are but masks for indifference and confusion. And even over that ever-decreasing minority who still believe, inwardly as well as outwardly, for whom the other world is more real than this world—even over these the shadow of the "death of God" has fallen and made the world a different and a strange place.

Nietzsche, in the *Will to Power*, comments very succintly on the meaning of nihilism:

> What does nihilism mean?—That the highest values are losing their value. There is no goal. There is no answer to the question: "why?"

Everything, in short, has become questionable. The magnificent certainty we see in the Fathers and Saints of the Church, and in all true believers, that refers everything, whether in thought or life, back to God, seeing

everything as beginning and ending in Him, everything as His will—this certainty and faith that once held society and the world and man himself together, are now gone, and the questions for which men once had learned to find the answers in God, now have—for most men—no answers.

There have been, of course, other forms of coherence than Christianity, and forms of incoherence other than modern nihilism and absurdity. In them human life makes sense, or fails to make sense, but only to a limited degree. Men who believe and follow, for example, the traditional Hindu or Chinese view of things, possess a measure of truth and of the peace that comes from truth—but no absolute truth, and not the "peace that passes all understanding" that proceeds only from absolute truth; and those who fall away from this relative truth and peace have lost something real, but they have not lost everything, as has the apostate Christian. Never has such disorder reigned in the heart of man and in the world today; but this is precisely because man has fallen away from a truth and a coherence that have been revealed in their fullness only in Christ. Only the Christian God is at the same time all power and all love; only the Christian God, through His love, has promised men immortality and, through His power to fulfill that promise, has prepared a Kingdom in which men will live in God as gods, having been raised from the dead. This is a God and His promise so incredible to the ordinary human understanding that, once having believed it, men who reject it can never believe anything else to be of any great value. A world from which such a God has been removed, a man in whom such a hope has been extinguished—are, indeed, in the eyes of those who have undergone such a disillusionment, "absurd".

"God is dead", "there is no truth": the two phrases have precisely the same meaning; they are alike a revelation of the absolute absurdity of a world whose center is no longer God, but—nothing. But just here at the very heart of absurdism, its dependence upon the Christianity it rejects is most apparent. One of the most difficult of Christian doctrines for the non-Christian and anti-Christian to understand and accept is that of the *creatio ex nihilo*: God's creation of the world not out of Himself, not out of some pre-existent matter, but out of *nothing*. Yet, without understanding it, the absurdist testifies to its reality by inverting and parodying it, by attempting in effect, a nihilization of creation, a return of the world to that very nothingness out of which God first called it. This may be seen

that very nothingness out of which God first called it. This may be seen in the absurdist affirmation of a void at the center of things, and in the implication present in all absurdists to a greater or lesser degree, that it would be better if man and his world did not exist at all. But this attempt at nihilization, this affirmation of the Abyss, that lies at the very heart of absurdism, takes its most concrete form in the atmosphere that pervades absurdist works of art. In the art of those whom one might call commonplace atheists—men like Hemingway, Camus, and the vast numbers of artists whose insight does not go beyond the futility of the human situation as men imagine it today, and whose aspiration does not look beyond a kind of stoicism, a facing of the inevitable—in the art of such men the atmosphere of the void is comunicated by boredom, by a despair that is yet tolerable, and in general by the feeling that "nothing ever happens". But there is a second, and more revealing, kind of absurdist art, which unites to the mood of futility an element of the unknown, a kind of eerie expectancy, the feeling that in an absurd world where, generally, "nothing ever happens", it is also true that "anything is possible". In this art, reality becomes a nightmare and the world becomes an alien planet wherein men wander not so much in hopelessness as in perplexity, uncertain of where they are, of what they may find, of their own identity—of everything except the absence of God. This is the strange world of Kafka, of the plays of Ionesco and—less strikingly—of Beckett, of a few avant-garde films like "Last Year at Marienbad", of electronic and other "experimental" music, of surrealism in all the arts, and of the most recent painting and sculpture—and particularly that with a supposedly "religious" content—in which man is depicted as a subhuman or demonic creature emerging from some unknown depths. It was the world, too, of Hitler, whose reign was the most perfect political incarnation we have yet seen of the philosophy of the absurd.

This strange atmosphere is the "death of God" made tangible. It is significant that Nietzsche, in the very passage (in the *Joyful Wisdom*) where he first proclaims the "death of God"—a message he puts in the mouth of a madman—describes the very atmosphere of this absurdist art.

> We have killed him (God), you and I! We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away

> from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forewards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker?

Such, in fact, is the landscape of the absurd, a landscape in which there is neither up nor down, right nor wrong, true nor false, because there is no longer any commonly accepted point of orientation.

Another, more immediately personal, expression of the absurdist revelation is contained in the despairing cry of Ivan Karamazov: "If there is no immortality, everything is permitted." This, to some, may sound like a cry of liberation; but anyone who has thought deeply about death, or who has encountered, in his own experience, a concrete awareness of his own impending death, knows better than that. The absurdist, though he denies human immortality, at least recognizes that the question is a central one—something most humanists, with their endless evasions and rationalizations, fail to do. It is possible to be indifferent to this question only if one has no love for truth, or if one's love for truth has been obscured by more deceptive and immediate things, whether pleasure, business, culture, worldly knowledge, or any of the other things the world is content to accept in place of truth. The whole meaning of human life depends on the truth—or falsity—of the doctrine of human immortality.

To the absurdist, the doctrine is false. And that is one of the reasons why his universe is so strange: there is no hope in it, death is its highest god. Apologists for the absurd, like apologists for humanist stoicism, see nothing but "courage" in this view, the "courage" of men willing to live without the ultimate "consolation" of eternal life; and they look down on those who require the "reward" of Heaven to justify their conduct on earth. It is not necessary, so they think, to believe in Heaven and Hell in order to lead a "good life" in this world. and their argument is a persuasive one even to many who call themselves Christians and are yet quite ready to renounce eternal life for an "existential" view that believes only in the present moment.

Such an argument is the worst of self-deceptions, it is but another of the myriad masks behind which men hide the face of death; for if death were truly the end of men, no man could face the full terror of it. Dostoevsky was quite right in giving to human immortality such central importance

in his own Christian world-view. If man is after all to end in nothingness, then in the deepest sense it does not matter what he does in this life, for then nothing he may do is of any ultimate consequence, and all talk of "living this life to the full" is empty and vain. It is absolutely true that if "there is no immortality", the world is absurd and "everything is permitted"—which is to say, nothing is worth doing, the dust of death smothers every joy and prevents even tears, which would be futile; it would indeed be better if such a world did not exist. Nothing in the world—not love, not goodness, not sanctity,—is of any value, or indeed even has any meaning, if man does not survive death. He who thinks to lead a "good life" that ends in death does not know the meaning of his words, they but caricature Christian goodness, which finds its fulfillment in eternity. Only if man is immortal, and only if the next world is as God as revealed it to His chosen people, Christians, is there any value or meaning to what man does in this life; for then every act of man is a seed of good or evil that sprouts, to be sure, in this life, but which is not reaped until the future life. Men who, on the other hand, believe that virtue begins and ends in this life are but one step from those who believe that there is no virtue at all; and this step—a fact of which our century bears eloquent witness—is all too easily taken, for it is, after all, a logical step.

Disillusionment, in a sense, is preferable to self-deception. It may, if taken as an end in itself, lead to suicide or madness; but it may also lead to an awakening. Europe for five centuries and more has been deceiving itself, trying to establish a reign of humanism, liberalism, and supposedly Christian values on the basis of an increasingly sceptical attitude toward Christian truth. Absurdism is the end of that road; it is the logical conclusion of the humanist attempt to soften and compromise Christian truth so as to accomodate new, modern, that is to say, worldly, values. Absurdism is the last proof that Christian truth is absolute and uncompromising, or else it is the same as no truth at all; and if there is no truth, if Christian truth if not to be understood literally and absolutely, if God is dead, if there is no immortality—then this world is all there is, and this world is absurd, this world is Hell.

The absurd view of life, then, does express a partial insight: it draws the conclusions of humanist and liberal thought to which well-meaning humanists themselves have been blind. Absurdism is no merely arbitrary

irrationalism, but a part of the harvest European man has been sowing for centuries, by his compromise and betrayal of Christian truth.

It would be unwise, however, to exaggerate in this direction, as apologists for the absurd to, and see in absurdism and its parent nihilism signs of a turn or a return to hitherto neglected truths or to a more profound world-view. The absurdist, to be sure, is more realistic about the negative and evil side of life, as manifest both in the world and in man's nature; but this is after all very little truth in comparison with the great errors absurdism shares with humanism. Both are equally far from the God in Whom alone the world makes sense; neither consequently has any notion of spiritual life or experience, which are nourished by God alone; both therefore are totally ignorant of the full dimensions of reality and of human experience; and both have thus a radically oversimplified view of the world and especially of human nature. Humanism and absurdism, in fact, are not as far apart as one might have supposed; absurdism, in the end, is simply disillusioned but unrepentant humanism. It is, one might say, the last stage in the dialectical procession of humanism away from Christian truth, the stage in which humanism, merely by following its internal logic and drawing out the full implications of its original betrayal of Christian truth, arrives at its own negation and ends in a kind of humanist nightmare, a subhumanism. The subhuman world of the absurdist, though it may at times seem eerie and bewildering, is after all the same one-dimensional world the humanist knows, only rendered "mysterious" by various tricks and self-deceptions; it is a parody of the true world, the world the Christian knows, the world that is truly mysterious because it contains heights and depths of which no absurdist, and surely no humanist, even dreams.

If, intellectually, humanism and absurdism are distinguished as principle and consequence, they are united in a deeper sense, for they share a single will, and that will is the annihilation of the Christian God and the order He has established in the world. These words will seem strange to anyone disposed to take a sympathetic view of the "plight" of contemporary man, and especially to those who listen to the arguments of absurdist apologetics which cite supposed scientific "discoveries" and the all-too-natural disillusionment that has come out of our century of war and revolution: arguments, in short, that rely on the "spirit of the age," which seem to make any but a philosophy of absurdity next to impossible. The universe, so this apology runs, has become meaningless, God has died, one knows

not quite how or why, and all we can do now is to accept the fact and resign ourselves to it. But the more perceptive absurdists themselves know better. God has not merely died, said Nietzsche, rather men have murdered Him; and Ionesco, in an essay on Kafka, recognizes that "if man no longer has a guiding thread (i.e., in the labyrinth of life), it is because he no longer wanted to have one. Hence his feeling of guilt, of anxiety, of the absurdity of history." A vague feeling of guilt is, indeed, in many cases, the only remaining sign of man's involvement in bringing about the condition in which he now finds himself. But man *is* involved, and all fatalism is only rationalization. Modern science is quite innocent in this respect, for in itself it must be, not merely neutral, but actively hostile to any idea of ultimate absurdity, and those who exploit it for irrationalist ends are not thinking clearly. And as to the fatalism of those who believe that man must be a slave to the "spirit of the age", it is disproved by the experience of every Christian worthy of the name—for the Christian life is nothing if it is not a struggle against the spirit of *every* age for the sake of eternity. Absurdist fatalism is in the end the product, not of knowledge nor of any necessity, but of blind faith. The absurdist, of course, would rather not face too squarely the fact that his disillusionment is an act of faith, for faith is a factor that testifies against determinism. But there is something even deeper than faith which the absurdist has even more reason to avoid, and that is the will; for the direction of a man's will is what chiefly determines his faith and the whole personal world-view built upon that faith. The Christian, who possesses a coherent doctrine of the nature of man and should have thereby a deep insight into human motives, can see the ultimate responsibility the absurdist prefers to deny in his disillusioned view of the world. The absurdist is not the passive "victim" of his age or its thought, but rather an active—though often confused—collaborator in the great undertaking of the enemies of God. Absurdism is not primarily a phenomenon of the intellect, not simple atheism nor mere recognition of the fact of an absent God—these are its disguises and rationalizations; it is rather something of the will, an anti-theism (a term applied by Proudhon to his own program, and seen by de Lubac, in *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, as a key to understanding other revolutionaries), a fight against God and the Divine order of things. No absurdist, to be sure, can be fully aware of this; he cannot and will not think clearly, he lives on self-delusion. No one (unless

it be Satan himself, the first absurdist) can deny God and refuse his own truest happiness in full consciousness of the fact; but somewhere deep within every absurdist, far deeper than he himself usually wishes to look, lies the primordial refusal of God which has been responsible for all the phenomena of absurdism as well as for the incoherence that indeed lies at the very heart of this age.

If it is impossible not to sympathize with some at least of the artists of the absurd, seeing in them an agonized awareness and sincere depiction of a world that is trying to live without God, let us not for all that forget how thoroughly at one these artists are with the world they depict; let us not lose sight of the fact that their art is so successful in striking a responsive chord in many precisely beause they share the errors, the blindness and ignorance, and the perverted will of the age whose emptiness they depict. To transcend the absurdity of the contemporary world requires, unfortunately, a great deal more than even the best intentions, the most agonized suffering, and the greatest artistic "genius". The way beyond the absurd lies in truth alone; and this is precisely what is lacking as much in the contemporary artist as in his world, it is what is activey rejected as definitely by the self-conscious absurdist as it is by those who live the absurd life without being aware of it.

To sum up, then, our diagnosis of absurdism: it is the life lived, and the view of life expressed, by whose who can or will no longer see God as the beginning and end, and the ultimate meaning, of life; those who therefore do not believe His Revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ and do not accept the eternal Kingdom He has prepared for those who do believe and who live this faith; those who, ultimately, can hold no one responsible for their unbelief but themselves. But what is the *cause* of this disease? What, beyond all historical and psychological causes—which can never be more than relative and contributory—what is its real motivation, its spiritual cause? If absurdism is indeed a great evil, as we believe it to be, it cannot be chosen for its own sake; for evil has no positive existence, and it can only be chosen in the guise of a seeming good. If up to this point we have described the negative side of the philosophy of the absurd, its description of the disordered, disoriented world in which men find themselves today, it is time to turn to its positive side and discover in what it is that absurdists place their faith and hope.

For it is quite clear that absurdists are not happy about the absurdity of the universe; they believe in it, but they cannot reconcile themselves to it, and their art and thought are attempts, after all, to transcend it. As Ionesco has said (and here he speaks, probably, for all absurdists): "to attack absurdity is a way of stating the possibility of non-absurdity", and he sees himself as engaged in "the constant search for an opening, a revelation". Thus we return to the sense of expectancy we have already noted in certain absurdist works of art; it is but a reflection of the situation of our times, wherein men, disillusioned and desolate, yet hope in something unknown, uncertain, yet to be revealed, which will somehow restore meaning and purpose to life. Men cannot live without hope, even in the midst of despair, even when all cause for hope has been, supposedly, "disproved".

But this is only to say that nothingness, the apparent center of the absurdist universe, is not the real heart of the disease, but only its most striking symptom. The real faith of absurdism is in something hoped for but not yet fully manifest, a "Godot" that is the always implicit but not yet defined subject of absurdist art, a mysterious something that, if understood, would give life some kind of meaning once more.

All this, if it seems vague in comtemporary absurdist art, is quite clear in the works of the original "prophets" of the age of absurdity, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. In them the revelation of absurdity has a corollary. "Dead are all the gods," says Nietzsche's Zarathustra: "now do we desire the Superman to live." And Nietzsche's madman says, of the murder of God: "Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Shall we not ourselves have to become gods, merely to seem worthy of it?" Kirillov, in Dostoevsky's *Possessed*, knows that "if there is no God, then I am God."

Man's first sin, and the ultimate cause of the miserable condition of man in all ages, was in following the temptation of the serpent in Paradise: "Ye shall be as gods." What Nietzsche calls the Superman, and Dostoevsky the Mangod, is in fact the same god of *self* with which the Devil then, and always, has tempted man; it is the only god, once the true God has been rejected, whom men can worship. Man's freedom has been given him to choose between the true God and himself, between the true path to deification whereon the self is humbled and crucified in this life to be resurrected and exalted in God in eternity, and the false path of self-deification which promises exaltation in this life but ends in the Abyss. These are the only two choices, ultimately, open to the freedom of man; and upon them have

been founded the two Kingdoms, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Man, which may be discriminated only by the eye of faith in this life, but which shall be separated in the future life as Heaven and Hell. It is clear to which of them modern civilization belongs, with its Promethean effort to build a Kingdom of earth in defiance of God; but what should be clear enough in earlier modern thinkers becomes absolutely explicit in Nietzsche. The old commandment of "Thou shalt", says Zarathustra, has become outmoded; the new commandment is "I will". And in Kirillov's satanic logic, "the attribute of my godhead is self-will." The new religion, the religion not yet fully revealed that will succeed the old religion of Christianity to which modern man thinks by now to have delivered the final blow—is supremely the religion of self-worship.

This is what absurdism—and all the vain experimentation of our day—is seeking. Absurdism is the stage at which the modern Promethean effort hesitates, entertains doubts, and has a faint foretaste of the satanic incoherence in which it cannot but end. But if the absurdist is less confident and more fearful than the humanist, he nonetheless shares the humanist faith that the modern path is the right path, and in spite of his doubt he retains the humanist hope—hope not in God and His Kingdom, but in man's own Tower of Babel.

The modern attempt to establish a kingdom of self-worship reached one extreme in Hitler, who believed in a racial Superman; it reaches another extreme in Communism, whose Superman is the collectivity and whose self-love is disguised as altruism. But both Naziism and Communism are extreme forms—their phenomenal success proves it—of what everyone else today actually believes: everyone, that is, who does not stand explicitly and absolutely with Christ and His Truth. For what is the meaning of the gigantic effort in which all nations have today joined to transform the face of the earth and conquer the universe, to bring about an entirely new order of things wherein man's condition since his creation will be radically transformed and this earth, which since man's fall has been and can be nothing but a place of sorrow and tears, is to become, supposedly, a place of happiness and joy, a veritable heaven on earth with the advent of a "new age"? What does this mean but that man, freed of the burden of a God in Whom he does not believe even when he professes Him with his lips, imagines himself to

be God, master of his own destiny and creator of a "new earth", expressing his faith in a "new religion" of his own devising wherein humility gives way to pride, prayer to worldly knowledge, mastery of the passions to mastery of the world, fasting to abundance and satiety, tears of repentance to worldly joy.

To this religion of the self absurdism points the way. This is not, to be sure, always its explicit intention, but it is its distinct implication. Absurdist art depicts a man imprisoned in his own self, unable to communicate with his fellow man or enter into any relationship with him that is not inhuman; there is no love in absurdist art, there is only hatred, violence, terror, and boredom—because in cutting himself off from God, absurdist man has cut himself off from his own humanity, the image of God. If such a man is awaiting a revelation that will put an end to absurdity, it is surely not the revelation that Christians know; if there is one point on which all absurdists would agree, it is the absolute rejection of the Christian answer. Any revelation the absurdist, as absurdist, can accept must be "new". About Godot, in Beckett's play, one character says, "I'm anxious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it." In the Christian life everything is referred to Christ, the old self with its constant "I will" must be done away with and a new self, centered in Christ and His will, be born; but in the spiritual universe of "Godot", everything revolves precisely about the old self, and even a new god must present himself as a kind of spiritual merchandise to be accepted or rejected by a self that will tolerate nothing that is not oriented to itself. Men today "wait for Godot"—who is, perhaps, on one level, Antichrist—in the hope that he will bring appeasement of conscience and restore meaning and joy to self-worship, in the hope that is, that he will permit what God has forbidden and provide the ultimate apology for it. Nietzsche's Superman is absurdist, modern man with his sense of guilt obliterated in a frenzy of enthusiasm generated by a false mysticism of the earth, a worship of this world.

Where will it all end? Nietzsche and the optimists of our day see the dawn of a new age, the beginning of "a higher history than any history hitherto". Communist doctrine affirms this; but the Communist reorganization of the world will, in the end, prove to be no more than the systematized absurdity of a perfectly efficient machine that has no ultimate purpose. Dostoevsky, who knew the true God, was more realistic. Kirillov, the maniacal counterpart of Zarathustra, had to kill himself to prove that he

was God; Ivan Karamazov, who was tormented by the same ideas, ended in madness, as did Nietzsche himself; Shigalev (in *The Possessed*), who devised the first perfect social organization of mankind, found it necessary to deliver nine-tenths of mankind to absolute slavery so that one-tenth might enjoy absolute liberty—a plan that Nazi and Communist Supermen have put into practice. Madness, suicide, slavery, murder, and destruction are the ends of the presumptuous philosophy of the death of God and the advent of the Superman; and these are, indeed, prominant themes of absurdist art.

Many feel—with Ionesco—that only out of thorough exploration of the absurd condition in which man now finds himself, and of the new possibilities this has opened up for him, may a way be found beyond absurdity and nihilism into some new realm of coherence: this is the hope of absurdism and humanism, and it will become the hope of Communism when (and if) it enters its period of disillusionment. It is a false hope, but it is a hope that may, for all that, be fulfilled. For Satan is the ape of God, and once divine coherence has been shattered and men no longer hope for the absolute coherence God alone can give to human life, the counterfeit coherence that Satan is able to fabricate may come to seem quite attractive. It is no accident that in our own day serious attention is being given once more by responsible and sober Christians dissatisfied alike with facile optimism and facile pessimism, to a doctrine that, in Western Europe at least, was almost forgotten for centuries under the influence of the philosophy of enlightenment and progress. (Cf. Josef Pieper, *The End of Time;* Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament;* and before them, Cardinal Newman.) This is the doctrine, universally held by the Churches of the and West, of Antichrist, that strange figure who appears at the end of time as a humanitarian world-ruler and seems to turn creation upside-down by making darkness seem light, evil good, slavery freedom, chaos order; he is the ultimate protagonist of the philosophy of the absurd, and the perfect embodiment of the mangod: for he will worship only himself, and will call himself God. This is no place, however, to do more than point out the existence of that doctrine, and to note its intimate connection with the Satanic incoherence of the philosophy of the absurd.

But more important even than the historical culmination of absurdism, whether it be the actual reign of Antichrist or merely another of his predecessors, is its supra-historical end: and that is Hell. For absurdism is,

most profoundly, an irruption of Hell into our world; it is thus a warning of a reality men are all too anxious to avoid. But those who avoid it only bind themselves the closer to it; our age, the first in Christian times to disbelieve entirely in Hell, itself more thoroghly than any other embodies the spirit of Hell.

Why do men disbelieve in Hell? It is because they do not believe in Heaven, i.e., because they do not believe in life, and in the God of life, because they find God's creation absurd and wish that it did not exist. The Starets Zossima, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, speaks of one kind of such men.

> There are some who remain proud and fierce even in hell... They have cursed themselves, cursing God and life....They cannot behold the living God without hatred, and they cry out that the God of life should be annihilated, that God should destroy Himself and His own creation. And they will burn in the fire of their own wrath for ever and yearn for death and annihilation. But they will not attain to death..."

Such men, of course, are extreme nihilists, but they differ in degree only, and not in kind, from those less violent souls who faintly curse this life and find it to be absurd, and even from those who call themselves Christians and do not desire the Kingdom of Heaven with all their hearts, but picture Heaven, if at all, as a shadowy realm of repose or sleep. Hell is the answer and the end of all who believe in death rather than life, in this world rather than in the next world, in themselves rather than in God: all those, in short, who in their deepest heart accept the philosophy of the absurd. For it is the great truth of Christianity—which Dostoevsky saw and Nietzsche did not see—that *there is no annihilation*, and *there is no incoherence*, all nihilism and absurdism are in vain. The flames of Hell are the last and awful proof of this: every creature testifies, with or against his will, to the ultimate coherence of things. For this coherence is the love of God, and this love is found even in the flames of Hell; it is in fact the love of God itself which torments those who refuse it.

So it is too with absurdism; it is the negative side of a positive reality. There is, of course, an element of incoherence in our world, for in his fall from Paradise man brought the world with him; the philosophy of the absurd is not, therefore, founded upon a total lie, but upon a deceptive

half-truth. But when Camus defines absurdity as the confrontation of man's need for reason with the irrationality of the world, when he believes that man is an innocent victim and the world the guilty party, he, like all absurdists, has magnified a very partial insight into a totally distorted view of things, and in his blindness has arrived at the exact inversion of the truth. Absurdism, in the end, is an *internal* and not an external question; it is not the world that is irrational and incoherent, but man.

If, however, the absurdist is responsible for not seeing things as they are, and not even wishing to see things as they are, the Christian is yet more responsible for failing to give the example of a fully coherent life, a life in Christ. Christian compromise in thought and word and negligence in deed have opened the way to the triumph of the forces of the absurd, of Satan, of Antichrist. The present age of absurdity is the just reward of Christians who have failed to be Christians.

And the only remedy for absurdism lies at this, its source: we must again be Christians. Camus was quite right when he said, "We must choose between miracles and the absurd." For in this respect Christianity and absurdism are equally opposed to Enlightenment rationalism and humanism, to the view that reality can be reduced to purely rational and human terms. We must indeed choose between the miraculous, the Christian view of things, whose center is God and whose end is the eternal Kingdom of Heaven, and the absurd, the Satanic view of things, whose center is the fallen self and whose end is Hell, in this life and in the life to come.

We must again be Christians. It is futile, in fact it is precisely absurd, to speak of reforming society, of changing the path of history, of emerging into an age beyond absurdity, if we have not Christ in our hearts; and if we do have Christ in our hearts, nothing else matters.

It is of course possible that there may be an age beyond absurdity; it is more likely, perhaps—and Christians must always be prepared for this eventuality—that there will not be, and that the age of absurdity is indeed the last age. It may be that the final testimony Christians may be able to give in this age will be the ultimate testimony, the blood of their martyrdom.

But this is cause for rejoicing and not for despair. For the hope of Christians is not in this world or in any of its kingdoms—that hope, indeed, is the ultimate absurdity; the hope of Christians is in the Kingdom of God which is not of this world.

The Apocalypse of St. John

by

Archbishop Averky of Jordanville

CHAPTER SIX

THE OPENING BY THE LAMB OF THE SEALS OF THE MYSTICAL BOOK: THE FIRST TO SIXTH SEALS

6:1-2 *And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard as it wee the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.*

In the sixth chapter there is related the taking away by the Lamb one by one of the first six seals of the mystical book, and the signs that accompanied this. By the opening of the seals one must understand the fulfillment of the divine decrees by the Son of God Who has given Himself as Lamb to be slaughtered.

In the explanation of St. Andrew of Caesarea the taking away of the first seal is the sending into the world of the holy Apostles who, like a bow which directs the preaching of the Gospel against the demons, by its saving arrows has brought the wounded ones to Christ and received a crown because by the Truth they have conquered the chief darkness. This is what is symbolized by the white horse and the one that sits upon it with a bow in his hands.

"Here among those in heaven is to be observed the good order which descends from the first choirs to the second. For the first voice who commands the coming of the angel who mystically depicts the vision, was heard from one of the beasts—the lion. It seems to me that the lion signifies

(Continued on p. 223)

ABBOT NAZARIUS
AND HIS SPIRITUAL ARMY

Preface to the forthcoming book "Little Russian Philokalia", Vol. II

The second volume of the English language *Little Russian Philokalia*, is dedicated to the great refounder and abbot of Valaam Monastery, the humble monk of Sarov, Nazarius. The timeless quality of his teaching, a standard monastic counsel within a fundamentally Orthodox Christian society, is basically no different from that of fourth century Egypt, fifth century Palestine, sixth century Gaul, or Ireland, Sinai, Britain, Italy, Syria, and later Mt. Athos, from which it took its roots. But the timeliness of his exposition if so vital precisely because most of these lands have lost the basic Orthodox *Weltanschau*, world-view, or sense of unainimity, especially in the Western world, where Orthodoxy today is being rediscovered, not the way it originally was when it bore the stamp of the Catacomb mentality of the Early Church, but through the prism of academic opinion and complacency, which makes everything it touches a plaything of arbitrariness; such an interpretation of Orthodoxy cannot fit into the already existing, "unfashionable," "outdated," but genuine *suffering Orthodoxy*, as St. Gregory the Theologian used to say.

Abbot Nazarius, like St. Anthony the Great, was illiterate (he never learned to write) and spoke mostly *how* to practice basic Christianity in order to attain *sobriety* (nipsis) and be genuine. He did *not* give any leeway for idle meditating, theorizing, fantasizing, which is so akin to contemporary neophytes who discover Orthodoxy and immediately, with the same psychological fervor of "searching for truth," strive to remodel their discovery into their own liking, thus depriving themselves of *smirenomudrie* (humility of wisdom) which alone guarantees fruitfulness in Christ, and without

which there is no salvation. Hence, the message of Elder Nazarius is very simple—how, practically, to join the army of the "Unseen Warfare" and be one with the militant Church upon earth and one with the triumphant Church in Heaven.

His friend and fellow struggler from Sarov, Theohanes, remembers him thus:

"Father Nazarius was a simple man, unlearned, did not know how to write. Metropolitan Gabriel [of Petersburg †1804] used to inquire of Father Nazarius: 'Who is the worst one in your brotherhood?' to which he would answer: 'They are all good.' 'You mean to say there is not s single bad one?' 'Your Eminence,' came the answer, 'I am the only bad one.' Once Father Nazarius chanced to pass by a village where he saw children playing; he stopped the carriage, summoned the children, and asked: 'Who is the best among you?' The children pointed out a boy—'He is the best one here.' 'Why?' he asked. 'Because,' they answered, 'he is humble; you scold him and it is nothing to him.' 'Take the example from him,' said the elder. He lived in the desert [of Sarov] for seven years. I used to visit him there. He would wear boots without changing them for six years straight, his garment was ragged."

Another of his contemporaries, Abbot Maximus of Pesnosha Monastery, while still a youth, visited Valaam with the intent to stay there because of the fame of Elder Nazarius was so great. His biographer wrote:

"At that time, in the northern monastery of Valaam, the new monastic typicon from Sarov was being installed by Father Nazarius. Maximus arrived in Valaam and was accepted and thought to remain there forever. But Father Nazarius, who keenly watched for the spiritual development of young monks, noticed in him a spiritual zeal not in keeping with his years, and once during spiritual conversation told him this parable: 'Once upon a time, there lived a novice in Pesnosha Monastery who began to occupy himself with the Jesus prayer prematurely. The Elder stopped him but he did not listen. Then he moved to our Valaam monastery and continued to to occupy himself with the same type of prayer. Here too, they forbade him. But he remained obstinate. Because of that, he fell into the enemy's deception (*prelest*). One feast day he jumped down from the tall belfry and killed himself, thereby depriving himself of both temperal and eternal life. That occurred quite recently,' the elder added."

Just these two passages from his contemporaries give enough indication of the tenor of his concern for the spiritual welfare of the people around

him. And being a saint, we believe his concern extends even towards us, his venerators of the 20th century.

Prior to his Valaam abbotship, he lived a typical monk's life of Holy Russia, struggling to acquire the power of humility, being one in spirit with the rest of the Sarov monks. In Valaam he continued to practice the same age-old basic monasticism which attracted followers. His loving simplicity and his state of perpetual inspiration, burning in him at an even pace, as is apparent from his Counsels, worked wonders upon young newcomers. Without much pain, it transfigured them into veritable soldiers, members of the ascetic regiment of God's army.

His Valaam years, just as later the years of his Sarov retirement, gave the following outstanding spiritual heroes, who were to influence subsequent authors of the Russian *Philokalia*.

INNOCENT, his successor as abbot (†Sept. 22, 1928), was a visionary of the spiritual world who managed to restore and govern several other neighboring monasteries.

EUTHEMIOS, Hieromonk (†Oct. 1, 1829) was in the direct line with Paisian disciples. His spiritual son, the famous Abbot Damascene (†1881), even superceded Abbot Nazarius in the monastic flowering of Valaam and elsewhere.

STS. HERMAN, JUVENALY, and IOASAPH, of the Alaskan Mission of 1794; they not only became apostles to America, but managed to combine missionary work with a high, classical form of hesychasm here in the New World.

BARLAAM, Abbot (†Dec. 26, 1849) who spent time in desert living with the young St. Herman; there he acquired such zeal that led him to follow the Paisian disciple Leo to Optina, where he took part in the Skete's literary patristic activity.

HILARION, (†Nov. 12, 1841) his cell-attendent and correspondent, who took down all his precious sayings and even composed some himself. Thanks to him we have the Counsels. His closeness to St. Seraphim indicates his oneness of mind with that great Saint.

ST. SERAPHIM, (†Jan. 2, 1833), the great embodiment of Orthodox mystic experience, he was under the direct influence of Abbot Nazarius, and acquired from him the first edition of the Paisian Slavonic *Philokalia*.

RIGHTEOUS MARK, (†Nov. 4, 1817), he took upon himself at times the great ascetic exploit of foolishness for Christ's sake. Endowed with a

gift of clairvoyance and healing, he constantly beheld, like St. Seraphim, the Bright Resurrection in his heart, which would overflow at times while he wandered day and night through the dense Sarov forests, not knowing "whether he was in the body or out of the body."

May our Lord, Who sees the difficulty of our times, help and inspire the contemporary English-speaking Orthodox world through the prayers of our fathers among the Saints, Nazarius and his spiritual army of God-bearing fathers. Amen.

Abbot Herman
Annunciation, 1983

Blessed Abbot Nazarius

Sticheras composed in his honor by Father Seraphim Rose

On "Lord, I have cried," Tone 1, to the Special Melody, "Rejoicing of the Heavenly Hierarchies":

Ye islands of Valaam, rejoice,* be glad, ye forests of Sarov,* in you hath shone forth a wondrous teacher,* the glorious Nazarius,* who enlightened a multitude of monks* with the rays of true Patristic teaching,* and taught all to wage unceasing warfare* against the world, the flesh, and the devil* unto the salvation of their souls.

Dance for joy, ye waters of Ladoga,* leap up, O brook Sarovka,* by your side walked the wondrous anchorite,* the abbot and instructor of many monks,* the wise Elder Nazarius* who could not be hid in the wilderness,* but was placed upon a candlestand* that he might shine for the salvation of our souls.

Instructor of St. Herman,* and converser with our holy Father Seraphim,* O Nazarius, wise in God,* by thine angelic life and teaching,* thou wast a model for holy men,* a theologian by virtue of thy life in God.* Now dwelling in the choirs of those who praise God without ceasing* do thou entreat Him to save our souls.

(Continued from p. 218)

the royal authority of the Apostles over the demons....*He went forth conquering, and to conquer:* the first victory is the conversion of the pagans, and the second is (the Apostle's) voluntary departure from the body joined with tortures" (St. Andrew, ch. 13).

6:3-4 *And when He had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say: Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.*

The taking away of the second seal and the appearance of the red horse, to the one sitting upon which "power was given to take peace from the earth," signifies the arousal of the unbelievers against the believers when peace was bestroyed by the preaching of the Gospel in the fulfillment of the words of Christ: "I came not to send peace but a sword" (Matt. 10:34); and then the earth was abundantly watered by the blood of the confessors and martyrs for Christ. "The 'red horse' is the sign either of the shedding of blood or of the heartfelt zeal of those who suffer for Christ" (St. Andrew, ch. 14).

"Since the first beast signifies apostolic authority, I suppose that the calf, the second beast, indicates the sacred sacrifices of the holy martyrs" (St. Andrew, ch. 14).

6:5-6 *And when He had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.*

The taking away of the third seal and the appearance right after this of the black horse with his rider who has "a pair of balances in his hand" signifies the falling away from Christ of those who do not have firm faith in Him. The black color of the horse symbolizes "lamentation over those who have fallen away from faith in Christ by reason of the difficulty of the torments" (St. Andrew, ch. 15).

"A measured wheat for a penny..." signifies those who have lawfully struggled and carefully have preserved the image of God given to them. "And three measures of barley for a penny" signifies those who like cattle,

because of a lack of courage, have submitted to the persecutors out of fear, but later have repented and with tears have washed away their defiled image. "And see thou hurt not the oil and the wine" signifies that one should not out of fear renounce the healing of Christ or leave without Him those who are wounded and have fallen among thieves, but they should be brought the wine of consolation and the oil of compassion (St. Andrew, ch. 15). Many by the black horse understand the misfortune of famine.
"By the third beast I understand the man, which signifies the fall of men, and by the power of free will, the punishment for inclination to sin"

6:7-8 *And when He had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.*

We must help our brethren who have fallen in the persecution, giving them consolation (wine) and compassion (oil). The wheat for a penny indicates good price for good wheat; the barley indicates cheaper goods.

The taking away of the fourth seal and the appearance of the pale horse with its rider whose name is Death, signifies the manifestation of the wrath of God in revenge for the pious and the punishment of sinners. These are the various misfortunes of the last times prophesied by Christ the Saviour (Matt. 24:6-7).

We must help our brethren who have fallen in the persecutions, giving them consolation (wine) and compassion (oil). The wheat for a penny indicates good price for good wheat; the barley indicates cheaper goods.

The taking away of the fourth seal and the appearance of the pale horse with its rider whose name is Death signifies the manifestations of the wrath of God in revenge for the pious and the punishment of sinners. These are the various misfortunes of the last times prophesied by Christ the Saviour (Matt. 24:6-7).

"The high flight and the swooping fall upon its prey of the fourth beast, the eagle, indicates that the wounds come from above from the wrath of God for the revenge of the pious and the punishment of the impious, if only these latter will not be converted through correction to the better" (St. Andrew, ch.).

6:9-11 *And when He had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying: How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.*

The taking away of the fifth seal reveals the prayer of the holy martyrs at the throne of God for the hastening of the end of the world and the coming of the last judgment. The souls of the righteous who have suffered for Christ, as is evident from this passage, are under the altar of the heavenly temple, just as on earth from teh time of the martyrs there entered the custom of placing in the foundations of Christian temples and altars particles of the relics of the holy martyrs. The prayer of the righteous ones is explained, of course, not for any desire for any personal revenge but by the speeding up of God's righteousness on earth and His rewarding of each according to his works which is to occur at the Last Judgment and will make them participants of eternal blessedness since they have given their lives for Christ and His divine teaching. To them are given white garments, a symbol of their virtue and it is told them to endure "yet for a little season" until their fellow laborers and the brethren who will be killed just as they were, shall fill up the number so that all might receive the worthy reward from God.

6:12-17 *And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him That sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?*

The taking away of the sixth seal symbolizes those elemental misfortunes and horrors which will occur on earth in the last period of its existence immediately before the end of the world, before the Second Coming of Christ and the Last Judgment. These will be those very signs concerning which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself prophesied not long before His suffering on the Cross (Matt. 24:29; Luke 21:25-26).

These signs will evoke mortal fear and terror among people of all conditions who will live then on the earth, beginning with kings, nobles and generals and ending with slaves. All will tremble with the coming of "the great day of His wrath" and will entreat the mountains and stones: "Hide us from the face of Him Who sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb." Similar horrors were experienced by the murderers of Christ at the destruction of Jerusalem. On a yet greater scale such horrors will overtake the whole of mankind before the end of the world.

"The earthquake, of which we often read in Scripture, is a change of things; wherefore also, the expression 'yet once more I shake the earth' (Hag. 2:7) signifies as the Apostle says, 'the removal of these things that are shaking' (Heb. 12:26-27)

The blackness of the sun and the dark and bloody appearance of the moon indicate, as the Blessed Cyril has often expressed it, the darkness of soul of those upon whom the wrath of God will come. And that 'the stars fell', as has been written also of those deprived by Antiochus, indicate that those who think themselves to be lights of the world will fall, being crushed and defeated by what will happen at that time, when as the Lord has said, "If it were possible they should deceive the very elect" by reason of the great tribulation (Matt. 24:24). This is perhaps why there is given here the indication of the fig tree, which, at the blowing of the wind of the devil, casts down its fruit while still unripe, since they have not ripened in the heat of temptations and are not sweetened by grace...

"Whether all this will turn out in a physical form at the glorious Coming of Christ the King is known by Him Who possesses the mystical treasury of knowledge and wisdom" (St. Andrew, ch. 18).

"The heaven is not to be subject to corruption and destruction but, as it were, to a certain rolling up and change for the better. Irenaeus, in his fifth accusatory Homily Against the Reason (falsely so-called), says: 'Neither the essence nor the being of the creation will perish or will be destroyed, for true and strong is He Who created it, but the fashion of

this world passeth away (I Cor. 7:31), the world in which the transgression was performed" (St. Andrew, ch.).

"At the coming of Antichrist, those (called here symbolically mountains) who are leaders either over the good order of the Church or over the worldly dominions, and the churches of the faithful which are presented here under the image of islands...will fall from their places, changing them one for another—something which we experienced because of our sins also before His Coming" (St. Andrew, ch. 18).

SCRIPTURE PARALLELS IN CHAPTER SIX

6:8

Matt. 24:6-7. *And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.*

6:12-17

Matt. 24:29. *Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, the moon shall not give her light and the stars shall fall from the heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*

Luke 21:25-26. *And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*

6:17

Hebrews 12:26-27. *Whose voice then shook the earth; but now He hath promised saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things which cannot be shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.*

I Cor. 7:31. *And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.*

Archbishop Barlaam

by Abbot Herman

PART II

IV.

LETTERS FROM EXILE ON SPIRITUAL LIFE

The letters which have survived and reached the free world, thanks to Samizdat, were written from 1923 up to 1936, after which there is no trace whatever of Bishop Herman. There are seven letters of Archbishop Barlaam and 39 of his brother. They were written to encourage their spiritual children, having one main theme: sobriety and guidance in acquiring the principle virtue—the humility of wisdom. They also reveal, in a disguised form, some bits of information about their authors: their perpetual harassment, from prison to exile and back again to prison, and their amazing absence of bitterness. Here are some major points of their teaching:

1. The letters contain a perceptive analysis of the behavioral patterns of our fallen nature from the patristic, spiritual, and psychological points of view.

2. The lessons they give come from *personal experience* in the deeply tragic situation they were forced to endure: exile, a constant lack of daily essential needs, harassments, perpetual banishment (in the case of Bishop Herman) and physical ailments (Archbishop Barlaam).

3. There is demonstrated in them a remarkable peace, a deeply poetic inward inspiration, interspersed with paraphrases (due to the absence of books in exile) of exalted patristic writings on ascetic life, or with melancholy lyrical retreats into past reality or into the hidden beauty even of the present. In short, the letters give an *ascetic philosophy of love for God and for life.*

4. The meaning of suffering: Suffering is when our spirit or "self" must separate itself from its own righteousness and must accept God's righteousness, which is hard and confining to our soul—in other words, it means to accept God's will rather than our own, so that we might become instruments of God.

5. The meaning of spiritual happiness: "What happiness and what endless and everlasting joy, to be at least a partial participant in those Wounds by which all have been healed, and to be at least a minute particle of that mighty eternal Power which indicates to all creation the eternally ancient and eternally new path to the Resurrection through self-denial and love"—writes Bishop Herman.

Here are some excerpts from the teaching of the brother-bishops:

THE LETTERS OF BISHOP BARLAAM

1. *ON THE CORRECT SPIRITUAL ATTITUDE*

(Letter of Archbishop Barlaam to Abbess M.)

You wish to see your correction from weakness and negligence and thereby to be justified; but this is not quite correct. Study again what I wrote earlier; your soul has not taken in everything I said there. But don't be surprised—this can't be done all at once; it becomes clear gradually with God's help. I will repeat briefly:

1. We are not justified by correcting ourselves, not by good deeds; all this is undermined by our common sinfulness, and in any case we are obliged to do it by our God-like nature. But we are *justified* by humility and repentance: *A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; a heart that is contrite and humble God will not despise.* You will find this somewhere in the letters of Optina Elder Macarius. Therefore, it is *good* that you have failings and weaknesses; with repentance and contrition they will lead you into Paradise. But if you do not have any, then a trust in your own correctness can hinder you greatly through secret self-esteem and a pharisaical trust in the labors and virtues you have borne: "I have earned it—pay me."

2. Further, you write: "I am afraid to receive Communion often; I do not get better; my sins are always the same." Well and good, but you wash your clothes often, and do you get angry because they don't get better but are always covered with the same dust and dirt? Is it not the contrary? So look in the same way at the purity of the soul: the more a man takes care of it, the better; the more often he washes away the dirt, the more pleasing it is to the Lord. And do not be disturbed if the dirt is always the same—it

is good enough it if only doesn't get worse. It makes no difference what it is that has soiled the purity of the soul; the time comes and one must clean it and wash away the uncleanness with repentance. And to the Lord a single repenting sinner is more pleasing than ten self-satisfied righteous men.

3. "I would like to be like M., but now I am afraid of being beneath even laymen." This means, again, you want to be included among the righteous; you do not have humility; you are always striving for the heights. It is the evil one who wants by every means to make you think of yourself: "I am not as other men." And why do you think so ill of laymen: Don't you know that many laymen will be higher than monks? In laymen there is much of the humility of the publican, much patience and contrition; while in monks there is often self esteem, hardness of heart, a pharisaical righteousness ("I have labored—pay me"). A humble person does not compare himself with anyone; he sees everyone as better than himself and closer to God; in some respects he considers himself worse than the demons. Of course, we can't attain to such humility, but at least we can reproach ourselves in our heart in everything and for everything (not just in words; this is often only a proud posturing), we can not condemn anyone and not exalt ourselves above anyone.

4. "I omit my rule, I become tired." Well, so what? We are saved not by a rule, but by humility and sighs to God. You seem to place great significance in the quantity of prostrations and in whatever else is read. No; all this can be just a "sounding brass"; but the whole matter lies in contrition of heart. It is profitable for you to set up a rule not of quantity, but of time; for example: in the morning you can pray for one or two hours. Without hurrying, with contrition of heart, and sometimes with interruptions if your heart experiences delight and softening—perform something from your rule without thinking of fulfilling everything. Thus it might be that you go through only half or three-quarters of your previous rule, and the assigned time is finished, and then there are works of obedience (cleaning the stove, etc.). And what of it? Don't be disturbed; finish with what you have managed to do, and know that the Lord will not demand more of you, but that He does not praise hurrying. He needs your heart, not a count of prostrations nor the mechanism or recitation (of prayers). One person, it may be, will read a single canon or akathist for a whole hour, but with

tears and interrupting it for heartfelt cries to God—that is real prayer. One can read the Gospel and the Psalter also, without paying attention to chapters and schedules, but to one's strength and time, being concerned for quality—to read with concentration, and not hastily. For the sake of works of obedience and concern for one's neighbor one must always shorten the time of one's prayer, since obedience is above fasting and prayer, and not be disturbed by this, but recognize the importance of serving one's neighbor. The quantity of prostrations and a certain correctness in the rule is indispensable for beginners so as to accustom them to pray; but when they have to a certain extent become accustomed to prayer, one should not bind one's feelings to a number of prostrations, but it is better to pray freely, depending only on the amount of time.

5. "Scold me and point out my shortcomings." First of all, I have to praise you for your openness and zeal for salvation. But I do have to scold you for your exaggerated love for correctness, for counting your good deeds and labors and for trusting in them, which is why you do not see the unlimited value of humility, which surpasses all our works and our limping virtues. This is a weak foundation, made, one may say, out of sand, and it can be tolerated only at the beginning of spiritual life, but later on it harms those who are struggling. It is easy with outward correctness (the reading of rules, the keeping of fasts) and with freedom from outward falls to pass over to spiritual self-esteems and to pride, and from there to "sanctity" and "clairvoyance" from the left side [demonic]. Quickly throw this foundation out of your head and heart; leave off giving value to labors, the correction of rules, and so forth. Do every good thing that is accessible to you, and bear every labor as an order from God, without evaluating it; for the value is not in them, but in the acquisition through them of humility, faith, profound purity, repentance, contrition, and finally, love for God and neighbor. No one praises a student when he is still studying, but when he receives a diploma. All labors are only lessons (props), while the diploma is in humility, contrition, purity (to the extent possible). One person might come to all this through sorrows or illness, without special labors and rules, and he will not be lower than those who have labored.

And so, make your own foundation of the soul, seeking self-reproach, repentance, patience, contrition, and firm and undeceived trust in God's

mercy. At the Last Judgment the righteous will be recognized only by their humility and their considering themselves worthless, and not by good deeds, even if they have done them. This is the true attitude.

2. *ON "GOOD" FEELINGS AND SELF IMPORTANCE*

He who is gloomy does not believe in the mercy of God, but bases his spirituality on his own rotten ascetic achievements and seeming external improvements; he boasts in them and being overwhelmed with self-importance, measures his feelings as if with a thermometer—alas, the fruits of self love!

Do not exalt yourself above any sinner, and do not place trust in your correctness, for self-esteem can devour all our feats and good deeds, if you have any. Meekly enduring other people's sins, although most difficult, is the most rewarding and surest way.

3. *ON ENDURANCE*

Where there is endurance, there is bound to be salvation. A relatively peaceful life, even if with a good prayerful attitude, is still lower than a life of tribulation with a good prayerful attitude, if one is patient with others.

4. *ON WHAT WE MUST FEAR*

One must fear not faults, but coldness of heart, self-satisfaction, an unrepentant attitude.

5. *ON CORRECTNESS*

We are all insane over self-esteem, and therefore when we correct ourselves a little in some way or other, we at once give value to ourselves and unnoticeably become refined pharisees: we praise ourselves for what grace has done, according to God's mercy, and not because of our achievements. Therefore, in spiritual matters correctness can do us more harm than incorrectness with a feeling of repentance. You will say: "With correctness one can also repent." Repent of what, if we see ourselves as correct? It is just a step away from deception. True correctness cannot exist. Therefore, the Holy Fathers teach that deeds do not justify us, even if we are obliged to do good deeds (by the power of God), as a bird is obliged to sing, for that is why it is created. We are created to do good deeds; such

is our nature. It would be silly to become proud that we have two arms and two legs—such is our nature. And if we do not do good deeds, then we err severely against our nature and God's will. Therefore, it is good to do the deeds, but not in order to boast in our struggles and achievements, but in order to acquire a greater degree of humility and repentance. He who fasts and prays not to acquire humility and repentance, but for pleasing God and for self-justification—is quite mistaken.

6. *ON INFIRMITIES*

Do not become despondent over your infirmities, and do not consider them your enemies. Quite the contrary: although ugly, they are our spiritual friends, our tax-collectors.

7. *ON SORROWS*

Sorrows are both proofs and pathfinders to the eternal, unearthly joys and experiences where our Lord, the Theotokos, and the saints are.

It seems that the time has come when our Lord is calling His people and is purifying them with sorrows in order to cross over into heavenly life; after all, this is the purpose we live for. May the will of God and His mercy be done! Let us hope for that, and let us prepare ourselves every day to meet God, and to live as during Passion Week.

8. *ON SELF-DEBASEMENT*

The seeing and evaluating of one's own achievements and deeds will only increase sinful and deceitful self-esteem and diminish our sole hope on God's mercy. What is more reliable and pleasing to God from us is the following: "O Lord, I have nothing and dare not even lift up my eyes; have mercy on me according to Thy great mercy!" The more there will be contrition and trust in God, and not in deeds or something else of our own, the more God's mercy will increase in us.

9. *THE INWARD TEMPLE*

There is no need to weep much over the destruction of a church; after all, each of us, according to God's mercy, has or should have his own church—the heart; go in there and pray, as much as you have strength and time. If this church is not well made and is abandoned (without inward prayer), then the visible church will be of little benefit.

LETTERS OF BISHOP HERMAN

1. *Letter of May 17/30, 1925*

You and I have not reached the spiritual condition when what is purely spiritual, or rather, when grace-given energy not only conquers the weakness of our flesh and the body, but also gives wings to our spirit, which is bound up with this burden (of the flesh) and is also not all-powerful, and without God has no wings. Up to now, by means of the natural physical and spiritual resources given to us by nature and our parents, the Lord and the Spirit of God act through this physical suppleness and energetic psychic nature of ours. But life itself at this time does not yet reveal to us its whole face; this is why there is so much vigor in us, and even more often, so much good idealistic and every other kind of passion.

But this zone sooner or later comes to an end, and there comes for everyone his Gethsemane with its battles and exhaustion, all the way to bloody sweat, and then also Golgotha. Both the one and the other cause torment and suffering, and suffering all the more often because our spirit has to separate itself from its own righteousness (no matter how pure and ideal it may seem to us) and be reconciled with the righteous will of God, which for our psychic nature is very confining and difficult.

You write that by May 1st "such-and-such" is to happen, and because of this your heart groans and you say: "This is the will of God, and in it there can be nothing tormenting"—and all the same you are tormented. Remember the bloody sweat of Gethsemane; remember these constant words of our Teacher, that one can follow after Him only by "taking up the cross." All this should tell you that the passage of our spirit into the will of God is always tormenting, as in general is every passage from a simpler form to a more perfect and higher form, such as is every physical and, all the more, every spiritual birth. We have here on earth only the beginning of this entire rebirth of our will into the Will of God, of our mind (even that of a believer) into the Mind of God, of our small and imperfect love into the Perfect and All-embracing Tri-hypostatical Love. When a man more fully and positively (that is, loving it, considering it as

the only truth in life) turns to the side of this eternal Truth, or else completely turns away from it, he no longer lives and is obliged to die. He has gone through everything that this life can give and has become ripe for the future.

The meaning of one's personal Gethsemane is: suffering and trembling inwardly, to fulfill patiently what has been commanded us, without upsetting oneself over the question why it is this way and not otherwise; for sometimes one is brought equally to God by the powerful shocks coming from a heartfelt acceptance of good, and by frightful falls. Judas was with Christ all the time, and he betrayed Him; the thief was without Christ the whole time, and he came to believe in Him. If neither in the life of the Lord nor in the history of our faith had there been clear indications of these alternations between light and darkness, and of the final triumph of light, then of course it would have been frightful. But we must cheer up our hearts with the words of the Apostle Paul, spoken about the Jews and the Gentiles, and perhaps applicable also to those now alive: "For God hath concluded them all in disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all" (cf. Romans 11:32). Further, we do not know how near or far from us is sorrow.

Ours is a time when too great shocks are needed, not only to wake up the minds of men, but also to return man to the central point of all that is truly human—to his heart.

Thus, your exhaustion of body and soul is understandable. Let us bear submissively His Cross, awaiting, if not here, then there, rest from the Lord and a full revelation of the profound meaning of everything that wounds and beats us now so painfully.

2. *Letter of August 30, 1932*

Here August will soon be at an end. Involuntarily, despite the crucial daily cares, thoughts, and worries which push away somewhere deep into the depths of the soul everything that has gone before, one remembers the Feast of Gethsemane (the Dormition of the Theotokos, August 15), the quiet skete filled with people, the prolonged and moving service around the tomb of the Most Pure One, the triumphal procession with her Shroud along the paths of the skete with the beautiful ringing of the bells, the

abundant meal with purple cabbage and fragrant kvas made of currants, and Bethany with its splendid rector, and the cozy town with the little house not far from the Lavra. In this remembrance purely spiritual experiences are interwoven with worldly and earthly ones, and it is difficult to separate them from each other, just as it is impossible to cut the soul away from the body and alter their mystical unity.

All this is lingered over by a kind of sweet melancholy that eats at the heart, as if seeing blue smoke in the distance on a clear summer day; and everything present, despite its spiritual advantages over the past, seems so cruel, crude, and severe. Will there ever be a chance to bring together this past, without its sin, and the present, without its cruel shocks and misfortunes, into a single bright whole, where everything there would be Christ, His unsetting light and mutual love, without which one feels so homeless and despondent nowadays. And at the present time His sword of division cuts away those who were once close and one in mind, and His meek humility and peace are absent even among those who are equally called by His Name.

But I believe that this will be, and the soul of each one who has gone through the torment of deprivations, falls, betrayals, faintheartedness, and denial will again, not merely through the lips and the passing movement of feelings, but with all their life, will sing out "Hosanna" to Him, as to the Conqueror of death and evil.

3. *Letter of October 5/18, 1933*

It seems to me that what is happening now is not merely the destruction of a fortress and of what for many is the holy of holies. What is happening is the cleansing of these holy things, their sanctification through fire of cruel trials and testings, through the destruction of forms which in their unique but in many respects earthly beauty crush the meaning and content which are chained within them. New forms are being forged that make it easier for them to be penetrated and filled by precisely the spirit and life which are often denied by their creators and which often, in the name of an admitted and premeditated battle against Him are denied in principle, in order that through the Golgotha of annihilation they might be resurrected in power.

Look and see how life in actual fact has become ascetic, how self-renunciation, an unheard-of self-renunciation, is becoming not an exception, but a rule for everyone, how urgently everything that has become separated in the most unlike spheres of life is coming to unity through collectivization, and so forth.

You will say that all this is not in His Name, but against Him. Yes, that is true. Now everything that has His seal is in sorrows, in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. This is true. But it is just as true that all efforts and creativity are being directed to the creation of the very forms of life which have all, in their idea, been predicted by Him, cannot be realized without Him, and unfailingly lead to Him. "All things are through Him, by Him, and unto Him," and only excessive grief or a superficial reflection on these great words of the Apostle hinder one from seeing that all this is being accomplished. Involuntarily one recalls the words of Chrysostom: "God acts through those very men who hinder and resist; He uses His enemies as an implement of His glory, so that you might know that no one can frustrate the decrees of God or avert His high right hand."

Ancient Israel had to come through the ruins of its marvellous temple, through long years of being deprived of the Divine services that make the heart contrite, and through a whole sea of tears, before reaching another house of God, in which they saw Him of Whom both their sacrifices and prophecies spoke. Mary Magdalene came to Him through the horror of demonic possession, Mary of Egypt through a furnace of immorality and raging fornication, the thief through the torments of the cross. These, it seems to me, are the signposts that should be placed in front of every grief and especially before one's intolerably sad recollections. You and perhaps the majority of us were near Him when He was fragrant with goodness and was surrounded by the grandeur of miracles, the light of reverence; now do not be afraid of His dishonor, of Gethsemane and Golgotha, so that, if not around you, then at least within you, you might see the unconquerable light of His truth and resurrection.

May the Lord help you in the approaching winter with all its cares and worries. The life of everyone is now going through the narrow gates, and he who submissively accepts this as the unavoidable and only path

to salvation is much happier than one who is upset, who complains about the inconvenience, and as it were waits for someone to push and shove him through the gates.

4. *Letter of December 2/15, 1936*

I think that what you are experiencing is being experienced now in some degree by very many, and only the noise of the present reality and the grandiose rebuilding, which demands an extreme concentration of all man's powers of soul, is drowning out these quiet groans of the soul and hindering men from understanding their prophetic meaning. Your condition is a reflection of the common disease and by no means is it something hopeless, because of which one must allow himself to become hysterical. It is not without the will of God that we have been placed in this whirlpool of passions, of warfare, and of every kind of brazen undertaking and fall. He never tempts by means of evil, and if one were to take away from the reality that surrounds us the spirit of excessive pride and sensuality, in everything we would see reflections of His Truth and His commandments. His laws have been placed in the hearts and minds of men. They are ineradicable, like nature. And although those who are building (i.e. the Soviets) in every way ignore Him and wish to remove Him and even the memory of Him from life, still He remains the cornerstone and the power of the fundamental ideas of the new society. In this is a pledge of a dawning and conversion and spiritual renewal, while for those who suffer and are pained over this "apostasy" it is encouragement, peace, and patience.

Do not be despondent. Without Him we are always naked and powerless. He is both yesterday, today and tomorrow the same. Can He be not with us, when around us and within us rages such a storm? And with Him we can endure anything and can valiantly encounter any temptation. He has power to take away instantly all pain from your heart, but does not do it, because it is better to let the pain take its course, and for this it is necessary to ask from Him only endurance.

THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

The information we have about Archbishop Barlaam's last years comes from the scanty mention of it in the letters of his brother, based on what his spiritual daughters wrote him after their infrequent visits to Archbishop Barlaam.

In 1931 Bishop Herman writes: "I am now in Great Ustiug. Nicholas (meaning himself) has had to endure and see in these parts a lot of hard things, but now he lives more or less peacefully. Victor (meaning Archbishop Barlaam) recently went to take his place at Zosima's (meaning St. Zosima's Solovki concentration camp)."

1932: "Barlaam is now at the Bear Mountain Station near Petrozavodsk (a fierce concentration camp)."

1933: "The other day I was overjoyed that the true dove of God B (Barlaam) has been set free from captivity, but I still don't know any details. It is so much more joyous because there was so little hope for this and they even said that he had died. And so many, so very many of my brethren and colleagues (bishops and clergy), especially there from whence God delivered me, have already gone to eternal rest. Only yesterday I received a letter from there, and it was horrible, from the human standpoint, to read, and more than that, to feel how death stands over everyone with whom you are not only united in a common path (clergy), but also in oneness of expectation (salvation). But from another point of view, in this process of dying I sense also redemption and resurrection. . . Give my greetings to Victor." In December of the same year: "Victor is all right in Vologda (exile)."

1935: "Victor lives as before in Vologda." And later: "Victor, it seems, has become a real invalid; he cannot walk for more than a few minutes due to the excessive exhaustion of his heart."

In May, 1936: "They went to Vologda in order to see the sick one. Two of the closest ones visited him. A tiny room with dirty wallpaper, thinly separated from the living quarters of the landlord by a curtain in place of a door. A poorly covered bed, near it a little table, and two other

tables against the wall. And that is all its furnishings. They write to me that he is thin, pale and totally grey. In everything there is deprivation, as it seemed to them, which is correct, but this poverty is pleasing to him. He received them very lovingly, was interested in the life of his brother, and advised him to spend more time occupying himself with the inward world, rather than with external things, even if they be good. There is much truth in this. Then he gave them spiritual counsel and consoled them greatly. May C (hrist) save him. He is pleased with his ailment, whcih has chained him to his bed and has almost made him an invalid. I myself deeply believe in the providence of this: it saves him from the exhausting changes of places (prisons) and undoubtedly helps him to accumulate more of that spiritual warmth whcih is so indispensable in our cold time. His brother (Bishop Herman) so far lives in the same situation You have probably heard about the sickness (arrest) which took hold of his relatives. For him it is a great sorrow, although it occurred not without the will of God, Who knows better than we what best leads each of us to our final and eternal goal." And in December he writes with envy: "Perhaps it is better for me to imitate Victor, who lives like a recluse." These were Bishop Herman's last known words.

There is even less mention about himself in Archbishop Barlaam's own letters; we can only guess what is in his heart: "It is very good for the soul's salvation to be a cell-attendant. As for myself, I would have gone to someone as a cell-attendant, but, alas, I have no strength and no opportunity. My legs feel better, however. . . But my general condition is worse. Before Cheese-fare Week I had a stroke. The doctor saw me twice. Now, glory be to God, it is better. Everything tiring is harmful for me, so I had to shorten my prayer rule. I need fresh air, but all I can go outside for is ten minutes. . . I read the whole Psalter during Great Lent and am shortening the Hours. The Psalmist says: *I remembered the days of old and gained knowledge of all Thy works* (Ps. 142:5). For you too it is very profiting to remember holy things in your life. It is not vanity, but a consoling relief for the soul; it is a substitute for spiritual reading."

After these few words, dating apparently from 1936. Archbishop Barlaam was abandoned. The letters from his brother came more and more rarely, until there were none, indicating either that he had been killed by

shooting or had perished in the nightmarish labor-camp system, which was then headed by the maniac Yezhov. Visitors to Archbishop Barlaam also decreased considerably, for they also were given over to the same fate. The pain in his legs and actually all over his body increased and he had a constant and penetrating cold, which settled deep inside his almost immovable body. The years of dying lingered on. His ailing heart still continued to beat.

Outside, the world was now at war. The hope in the Russian people of being liberated from the atheist yoke was growing more intense with each day of war and deprivation. The people's sufferings increased as the authorities, out of fear, put on more pressure. No one had time for Archbishop Barlaam. And in his forlorn state he understood all and ceaselessly prayed for the world. He knew of the glorious crowns God will bestow upon those who have suffered, upon those who have cultivated kindness of heart, forgiving love, and a deep understanding of human weakness. . . And he prayed for all.

He was not dead yet in the horrible Vologda prison. . . Listening to the majestic singing of the blizzard's howling wind, a many-voiced choir that rolled like billows over the ever-changing sea of life, he could not but pray to his patron saint, Monk Barlaam, that wondrous ascetic of old. Before a man dies, it is said, his patron saint together with his guardian angel comes to accompany the soul to the other world. This saint had gone to India and met the fair Prince Ioasaph, who was to inherit all the earthly riches of a great kingdom. But Barlaam, filled with divine zeal to make him an inheritor of the heavenly kingdom, converted him to Christ. And the heavens opened up to him, and he beheld the meaning of human existence and what is prepared for those who love God, the Giver of Life. Oh, what a blissful state he beheld when he was taken out of his body and placed in the heavenly Kingdom of Christ! He saw what unutterable joy awaits mortal men for all the suffering endured in this vale of tears, our earthly realm! The original Life of these saints presents a true revelation of Paradise, which the suffering hierarch Barlaam, now half frozen to death and covered with snow in his pitiable shelter, had read so many times in his younger days and now could not help but remember:

Now when he had prayed in tears for many hours, and often bent the knee, he sunk down upon the pavement. . . and he saw himself carried off by certain awesome men, and passing through places which he had never heretofore beheld. He stood in a mighty plain, all abloom with fresh and fragrant flowers, where he beheld all manner of plants of diverse colors, charged with strange and marvellous fruits, pleasant to the eye and inviting to the touch. The leaves of the trees rustled clearly in a gentle breeze, and, as they shook, sent forth a gracious perfume that never ceaed to please the senses. Thrones were set there, fashioned of the purest gold and costly stones, throwing out never so bright a luster, and radiant settlers among wondrous couches too beautiful to be described. And beside them there were running waters exceeding clear, and delightful to the eye. When these awesome men had led him through this great and wondrous plain, they brought him to a city that glistened with an indescribable light, whose walls were of dazzling gold, with high upreared parapets, built of gems such as man hath never seen. Ah, who could describe the beauty and brightness of that city? Light, ever shooting from above, filled all her streets with bright rays; and winged angelic squadrons, each of them itself a light, dwelt in this city, making such melody as mortal ear never heard. And he heard a voice crying: 'This is the rest of the righteous; this is the gladness of them that have pleased the Lord. . .'"

(St. John Damascene)

Finally the frost ceased its biting, and the soft dazzling snow, like lightning, with warm luster paved the way for the soul of the righteous hierarch Barlaam to ascend where the righteous repose. And he went up to join the saints, to the place prepared for the righteous, to be forever glorifying God. Amen!

Holy New Martyrs Barlaam and Herman, pray to God for us!

F.H.

Sources: Polsky, *Russia's New Martyrs*, Vol. II; "Russian Monk", March 6, 1911; Archbishop Nikon, *Biography of Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky*, Vol. I; Archimandrite Symeon, *Schema-Archimandrite Gabriel, Elder of Pskov;* Regelson, *Tragedy of the Russian Church;* St. John of Damascus, Life of *Sts. Ioasaph and Barlaam*; "Nadezhda", No. 5; "Vestnik", Nos. 107 and 109.

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